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Washington report

'Missing' Red China officer now in Moscow, but why?

WASHINGTON — A strange new note has been added to the mysterious disappearance of a number of high-ranking Chinese Communist military officers.

One of the most important of this group was spotted in Moscow recently by a highly reliable source for the Central Intelligence Agency whose information has been extremely accurate in the past.

The "missing" Chinese officer is Gen. Holung, one of China's 10 field marshals before the People's Liberation Army dispensed with ranks during the nation-shaking "Cultural Revolution."

Before his mysterious disappearance several months ago, Holung was the commander of the First Field Army, one of the five in the Chinese People's Liberation Army. It is located in the strategic northwest region of China and consists of a force of more than 350,000 military personnel.

Exactly what Gen. Holung is doing in Moscow or how he got there is still a mystery in intelligence circles here. All the CIA's source in Moscow was able to provide officials here was definite proof that the Chinese officer spotted was Holung, and that he was with a group of high-ranking Russian military officers.

Still missing and unaccounted for are 73 other senior military Chinese officers of general rank who have been missing since the "Cultural Revolution". Among these officers is Gen. Chen-i, commander of the powerful Third Chinese Communist Field Army, which controls the East Tibet region of China.

Known to be friendly to

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Soviet Union, Chen-i is believed to still be alive and also in Moscow although the CIA has not yet been able to confirm this.

Holung's unexpected appearance in Moscow could mean one of several things.

One group of CIA experts believes Gen. Holung defected to Russia and is now working with the Kremlin for the overthrow of ailing Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese Communist Party chairman, and Lin Piao, the deputy party chairman and defense minister.

The "defector" theory is based on recent information that Russia has set up a Chinese Communist government in exile in Moscow and is now recruiting supporters of deposed head of state Liu Shao Chi to fill its ranks.

Another group within the CIA contends that Holung is on a secret mission to Moscow for the Chinese military leadership. To support this theory, they stress that there has been no official Peking announcement of a replacement for Gen. Holung as the commander of the First Field Army.

The recent appearance in Peking of Yeh Chien-ying, an area commander under the "missing" Gen. Chen-i, has raised questions about the role that he might be playing in the new government of the Chinese Communist capital.

Gen. Yeh is a close friend

of Premier Chou En-lai, according to Chinese Nationalist diplomatic sources here. The New China News Agency, official organ of the Chinese Communist government, described Yeh as now being a member of the Chinese Communist Party Politburo and as vice chairman of the Central Military Affairs Commission.

His emergency in Peking, coinciding as it does with the continued "disappearance" of Marshal Lin Piao, the designated heir of Mao, has increased speculation here that he was summoned to the Chinese capital to represent the military in the talks now under way with Dr. Henry Kissinger, the President's chief foreign policy adviser.

Before departing for Peking, Kissinger was given a CIA briefing on the background of Gen. Yeh and his rising importance within the Chinese military leadership and his close relationship with Chou En-lai.

CIA Director Richard Helms also asked Kissinger to determine, if possible, whether the President's proposed visit had anything to do with the political power struggle now under way in Peking.

The request was the result of a British intelligence estimate passed on to the CIA that the Nixon trip had acted as a catalyst among the leaders of the Peking regime, upsetting the political equilibrium of the government by splitting the military men, who now dominate the power structure, into two camps.

One group of military men, according to the British, want to go along with the orderly management of China's

economy and bureaucracy, and use Chou's brand of international diplomacy to secure massive trade and aid from the U.S. The other group wants to stick with Mao and Lin Piao. They favor a strict conformity with Mao's thoughts, and the succession of Lin Piao to Mao-like leadership after Mao's death as provided for in the Communist Party Constitution of 1969.

If those supporting Mao and Lin Piao win out in the political struggle, it is the conclusion of the British intelligence estimate that the Nixon trip will be canceled. President Nixon and his intelligence advisers are hopeful Kissinger's visit to Peking will shed some new light on who is really running China.

In briefing congressional leaders on his upcoming Moscow trip, President Nixon reported that Soviet Foreign Secretary Andrei Gromyko had suggested he visit Russia in July.

In proposing May instead, the President stated: "I told Gromyko that July would be close to the star of the 1972 presidential campaign." The Democrats hold their party's national convention in Miami in July.

Rallies criticizing Pakistan for the situation in the Eastern part of the country are being held throughout Russia, according to the CIA. This is being taken as a sign at the White House that Russia is planning to step up its military aid to India.